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ABSTRACT

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HOW THEORIES ON ORIGINS CAN BE TAUGHT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS WITHOUT CONTROVERSY

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Abstract

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HOW THEORIES ON ORIGINS CAN BE TAUGHT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS WITHOUT CONTROVERSY

by Luther D. Sunderland

In our public educational institutions only one concept of origins is taught, namely, the theory of evolution. Although it is called a theory, most textbooks present evolution as though it were a proven fact. For instance, one high school biology textbook states: "All reputable biologists have agreed that the evolution of life on the Earth is an established fact."[1] By using quotations from the world's leading experts, this paper will show that evolution not only is far from a proven fact but, also, does not even qualify as a scientific theory. It is only reasonable, therefore, that both concepts of origins be taught: life either evolved from a common ancestor or appeared abruptly on earth fully formed.

The theory of evolution states that all living things have a common ancestor, that is, everything evolved from a single cell. Three possible explanations have been offered to account for evolution. The first, and most common, is a purely mechanistic one which relies on natural processes alone. The second explanation is theistic evolution and the third is some unknown perhaps yet-to-be discovered process.

The purely mechanistic explanation involves the spontaneous generation of the universe and the spontaneous generation of the first living cell. The simplest living cell that will reproduce itself is estimated to contain about a trillion bits of data in its DNA code. That is equivalent to the number of letters in all of the books in the world's largest library. The first living cell containing that much data is supposed to have organized itself when non-living chemicals were heated around the edge of a volcano. Then that first cell began making mistakes as it reproduced. These mistakes called mutations were acted upon by natural selection to weed out the less fit to produce all of the millions of species on the Earth. An alternative concept gaining widespread acceptance is punctuated equilibria which involves large jumps or rapid bursts of evolution abruptly producing new species followed by long periods of stasis. Dr. Stephen Gould of Harvard, co-author of the punctuated equilibria theory, wrote in the May 1977 Natural History magazine: "The fossil record offered no support for gradual change. New species almost always appeared suddenly in the fossil record with no intermediate links to ancestors in older rocks of the same region."[2]

The abrupt appearance theory, on the other hand, holds that many different types of living organisms first appeared on Earth with every organ and structure complete and fully functional. The same three possible explanations can be used for this theory - purely mechanistic, theistic and unknown. However, all imply pre-existing intelligence before life abruptly appeared. The mechanistic explanation could involve the transporting of completed organisms to Earth from elsewhere by spaceship.

No specific time span is required for the abrupt appearance theory and students should evaluate all available scientific evidences objectively without making uninformed, pre-conceived judgements about time.

To qualify as a scientific theory a concept must explain some repeatable process and there should be some way to determine by experiment or observation if it is not valid. Neither theory of origins, evolution nor abrupt appearance,

meets any of these requirements since both are assumed to be historical, unrepeatable processes or events. Furthermore, evolution cannot be tested because it is supposed to proceed too slowly to be observed and it would supposedly take hundreds of thousands or millions of years to convert one species into another. As one world-famous evolutionist, Theodosius Dobzhansky stated: "These evolutionary happenings are unique, unrepeatable, and irreversible . . . The applicability of the experimental method to the study of such unique historical processes is severely restricted before all else by the time intervals involved, which far exceed the lifetime of any human experimenter."[3] Philosopher of science Karl Popper declares that the study of evolution is "a metaphysical research programme."[4] In 1980 the British Museum exhibited a display which stated that Darwinism was not testable science. Therefore, neither evolution nor abrupt appearance meets the criteria of a scientific theory but both theories can be evaluated by comparing them against scientific data to see which is the more reasonable explanation of origins.

There are two kinds of evidences which permit the evaluation of these two theories: direct and indirect. The only direct evidence which relates to how life came to be is found in the fossil record. The remaining evidences include embryological recapitulation (similarity of appearance of structures in embryos), homology (similarity in structures of organisms) and serology (blood chemistry). These are only indirect and can be easily interpreted in various ways.

Geologists believe that the order in which sedimentary rocks are found and the fossils they contain give a picture of the history of the Earth. Most of the Earth's surface is covered with rocks formed when sediments deposited mostly under water became cemented together. These rocks, up to 10 miles deep, contain uncountable billions of fossils. There is certainly no scarcity of fossils.

As a matter of fact, our world's museums contain over 100 million fossils of about 250,000 different species. These fossils tell us about the structural characteristics of once-living animals and plants.

You can objectively evaluate the theories on origins by comparing them against scientific data contained in the fossil record. Then you can decide which one more closely fits the facts.

Let's review the concept of historical geology which is closely associated with evolution. About 100 years ago, men from Great Britain, observing the rocks in England, Scotland and France, put together a hypothetical arrangement of rocks called the Geologic Column. Nowhere on the Earth do the rocks actually all appear in this arrangement. Only small segments of the column are found at any one location. Since its inception the only significant change in this column has been in the time scale. On the average, during the last 100 years the estimated age of the Earth has doubled every 15 years; but it is currently estimated to be 4.6 billion years old.

The earliest clearly discernible fossils are found in the Cambrian rock strata. The billions of fossils found there are all of highly complex forms of life.

Rocks below the Cambrian are mostly void of indisputable fossils although what are believed to be some evidences of single-celled organisms are found below the Cambrian. The absence of Pre-Cambrian fossils has been characterized by paleontologists as the major mystery of the history of life.[5]

So in the Cambrian rocks is found a sudden explosion of billions of very complex creatures representing all major phyla in the animal kingdom. There is a monumental gap between the single-celled protozoa and these highly complex creatures. There is likewise no evidence of the development of a single cell from inanimate matter. Dr. Gould stated in the May 1977 Natural History magazine that: "The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology."[6] Hitching confirms this same thing in his recent book, The Neck of the Giraffe when he states: "But the curious thing is that there is a consistency about the fossil gaps: the fossils go missing in all the important places."[7]

One of the invertebrates like a sea squirt, a clam or starfish is supposed to have developed a backbone and turned into a fish, but there is no fossil evidence of this transformation. Again, evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould points out in his article: "All paleontologists know that the fossil record contains precious little in the way of intermediate forms; transitions between major groups are characteristically abrupt."[8]

Fully developed vertebrates in the form of heterostracan fishes have been found in Cambrian rocks as reported in the May 1978 Science magazine.[9]

The next transition is supposed to be from the fish to amphibian, but there are no fossils to be found showing a gradual development of the fins of the fish into the limbs and pelvic girdle of the amphibian. The amphibian is supposed to have changed into a reptile, but likewise no fossil evidence exists showing this transformation.

Abruptly are found herds of many types of dinosaurs in the fossil record, some with spikes on their tails and plates on their backs and some with spikes on their heads but there is no evidence showing gradual transition from one to the other. Abruptly they appear and abruptly they are gone.

No, not quite. According to evolutionary theory one of these reptiles converted its scales into feathers, climbed up into a tree and learned to fly. The fossil bird Archaeopteryx is presented as evidence of this transition because it had teeth, claws on the wings and other so-called reptilian features. It did have perfect feathers like modern birds and undoubtedly flew. As Dr. Colin Patterson of the British Museum of Natural History said in a 1979 letter regarding transitional forms: "I will lay it on the line - there is not one such fossil for which one could make a watertight argument. The reason is that statements about ancestry and descent are not applicable in the fossil record. Is Archaeopteryx the ancestor of all birds? Perhaps yes, perhaps no: there is no way of answering the question. It is easy enough to make up stories of how one form gave rise to another, and to find reasons why the stages should be favoured by natural selection. But such stories are not part of science, for there is no way of putting them to the test."[10]

What do the teeth and claws indicate? Other ancient birds had teeth and some did not. This is true of every subclass of vertebrates; some have teeth and some do not. Some fish have teeth and some do not. Some amphibians have teeth and some do not. Some reptiles have teeth and some do not. Some mammals have teeth and some do not; so how could the presence of teeth have anything to do with reptilian ancestry? What about the claws? There are three living birds which have claws on their wings.

The young hoatzin of South America has claws on its wings. The touraco of Africa has claws on its wings and the ostrich also has claws on its wings but no one has suggested that these birds are reptiles on their way to becoming birds.

Feathers are very intricately designed with thousands of tiny barbules to hook their parts together and prevent air leakage. They are completely different than scales and they do not get their stimulus for development from the same layer of skin as do scales.

In 1977 scientists discovered bones identical to those of modern birds in rocks classified as Upper Jurassic, the same as that in which Archaeopteryx was found. Thus, they now say we will have to look for the ancestors to modern birds in rock much older than that in which Archaeopteryx was found.[11]

The amazing feature of flight arose four times separately in insects, in reptiles, in mammals and birds. Insects are not believed to have learned to fly and then turned into flying reptiles, birds and mammals. Each of the four types of creatures is supposed to have acquired this marvelous feature independently. This is called parallel or convergent evolution where totally different organisms possess a similar feature and thus could not have derived the feature only once.

The fossil record shows the sudden appearance of fully developed flying insects in the form of dragonflies and cockroaches. Fully developed flying reptiles, the Pteranodon with a wingspan of over 50 feet, fully developed feathered birds and a fully developed flying mammal in the form of a bat having a skeleton identical to that of modern bat, appear in the fossil record with no intermediate forms connecting them to a non-flying ancestor.[12]

Simpson states that paleontological investigations have been unable to discover transitional forms leading to all orders of mammals. Further, he writes: "This regular absence of transitional forms is not confined to mammals, but is an almost universal phenomenon as has long been noted by paleontologists. It is true of almost all classes of animals, both vertebrate and invertebrate."[13]

Much has been speculated about how homo sapiens might have evolved from some ape-like ancestor. All primates, however, including tarsiers, new world monkeys, old world monkeys, anthropoid apes and man appear abruptly in the fossil record. On the final Walter Kronkite Universe TV program, world expert, Richard Leakey, said that he would have to just make a large question mark if asked to draw man's family tree. He said that the fossil evidence was too scanty to indicate man's evolutionary family tree and he didn't think we would ever be able to draw one.

Most people who consider the subject of origins with an unbiased mind conclude that the direct scientific evidence does not support the theory of gradual evolution. This is even admitted by evolutionist experts who, although they claim that evolution is a fact, feel it must be accepted on the basis of only indirect evidence. In the January 1979 Bulletin of the Field Museum of Natural History, Dr. David Raup says: "Instead of finding the gradual unfolding of life, what geologists of Darwin's time and geologists of the present day actually find is a highly uneven or jerky record; that is, species appear in the sequence very suddenly, show little or no change during their existence in the record, then abruptly go out of the record."[14]

Since the theory of evolution is not backed by direct scientific evidence, it should receive no more emphasis than the theory of abrupt appearance. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that both the abrupt appearance and evolution theories should be given impartial equal representation in public educational institutions.

A common objection to presenting any theory but evolution in public schools is that teaching it involves teaching religion. Promoting religion in public schools is agreed by all to be prohibited by law although it is perfectly legal to teach about religion. It has been pointed out, however, that presenting the abrupt appearance theory of origins in no way involves the teaching of religion or the interpretation of any religious document. When theories of origins are taught about in the manner presented in this paper there is never any controversy.

This paper follows the format and approach of an audio visual 35 mm slide presentation used in many public schools throughout the country since 1979. It is available from Sunderland Enterprises, 5 Griffin Drive, Apalachin, NY 13732.

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